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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8495  
INFO RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT PRIORITY 2257  
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA PRIORITY 0111  
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK PRIORITY 4147  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 1270  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2041  
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE PRIORITY  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 7025  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 8151  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0772  
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT PRIORITY 2990  
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 5635  
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 2060  
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 0354  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 2182  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PK](#)  
SUBJECT: RED MOSQUE UPDATE

REF: ISLAMABAD 1647

Classified By: DCM Peter W. Bodde, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Talks continued over the weekend between the leaders of the Red Mosque (Lal Masjid) and the government. Maulana Abdul Aziz and Maulana Ghazi, the two leaders of the mosque, have softened their public tone toward the government. During Friday's sermon, Aziz delivered a more tempered message than those of past Fridays, emphasizing that he was open to talks with the government and would keep the newly-established (and non-negotiable) Shariah court "non-functional" until talks with the government concluded. Ghazi told reporters that he has been in continuous phone contact with Pakistan Muslim League President Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain and, in Ghazi's opinion, Shujaat had a positive attitude and was doing "all he could do" to accommodate the mosque's demands. In the mean time, those demands appear to have increased: on April 15, Ghazi vowed to shut down liquor sales in Islamabad.

12. (C) On April 14, a group of students claiming to be from the Red Mosque raided a video store in Bharu Kahu, about 20 km from Islamabad. They burned CDs and videos outside the store, claiming to enforce their brand of Shariah law. Local police responded immediately, arresting three students and charging them under the Anti-Terrorist Act. Ghazi later claimed that no one from his mosque was involved in the incident.

13. (C) In opposition to the Red Mosque's calls for Shariah law, the secular Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) organized a large rally in Karachi on April 15. Newspapers carried pictures of thousands of protestors clogging the main streets of Karachi; including politicians, actors, artists, and religious leaders -- all protesting against religious extremism. MQM party chief in exile Altaf Hussain addressed the crowd via telephone from London, calling on the government to evacuate the mosque and associated madrassa.

The rally denounced the Red Mosque's actions as violating the teachings of Islam. Leaders from several religious sects issued fatwas (religious decrees) at the rally condemning mosques built on illegally occupied land such as the Red Mosque.

¶4. (C) The government's response continues to be measured, with Shujaat as the lead negotiator. Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz publicly said there will be no compromise on the writ of the government, but the government wishes to resolve the issue peacefully. The police presence in the markets and areas near the Red Mosque has increased significantly.

¶5. (C) Comment: The leaders of the Red Mosque have ceded little ground to the government so far, and the continued talks with Chaudhary Shujaat thus far have only given the authorities more time to peacefully resolve the issue. The large turnout at this weekend's MQM rally was evidence that most Pakistanis disagree with the Red Mosque's attempts to take the law into its own hands. Our police contacts continue to emphasize that direct confrontation is the least desirable option. However, it remains to be seen how long the government will allow the current situation to play out before it feels it is losing political capital. Today in a meeting with the Charge, National Security Advisor Tariq Aziz reaffirmed that the government was continuing to build public support against the Red Mosque agitators and that the leadership was expecting a peaceful resolution within the next two weeks. End Comment.

BODDE